SOUTH CAROLINA Energy Office

Energy Briefs

Helping You Live Energy Efficiently!

What About Apartments?

Although most apartments are smaller than single family houses, their energy costs can be greater. While increasing insulation levels and sealing air leaks in the building shell and duct-work make good sense for apartments, these measures are too costly for most renters given their typically-short occupancy times. However, apartment dwellers need not be doomed to high energy bills and discomfort. Let's look at a few energy saving ideas that should save enough to pay for themselves within two years or are easily taken to a new home.

Keep the Sun's Heat Out

Over 30% of your air conditioning bill can be due to sunlight streaming through unshaded windows. East and west facing windows are usually the biggest problems. Keeping direct sunlight from passing through these windows is important. Be creative. One apartment dweller with a green thumb grew beans in a pot with a trellis that provided cooling shade for a west facing sliding glass door.

If you cannot shade problem windows outside, then consider an inside solution. Window films can be glued to the inside glass surface and reflect heat back through the pane. Make sure the apartment owner does not restrict the use of films as they are expensive to buy and difficult to remove. A white pull-down shade is also effective at bouncing sunlight back through a window. Close shades and shutters during the day to keep room temperatures cooler.

Tighten Windows and Doors

The amount of air that leaks through the cracks around windows and doors can be more important for apartments than houses. Simple weatherstripping and caulking can be energy smart investments. Choose products that will last such as vinyl or metal weatherstripping and latex acrylic or silicone caulk. Try to caulk inside whenever possible to protect the sealant from weather.

Cut Hot Water Bills

The cost of electricity for heating water for a typical family of four can be over $400 a year. Propane water heating is about $260 a year; natural gas is about $150. You can often cut that bill significantly with simple conservation measures. Start with the temperature setting. Water at 120°F is plenty hot for most families. Temperatures higher than this pose a serious risk of scalding, especially for children and the elderly. Check the hot water temperature with a cooking thermometer (one that measures between 100°F and 160°F) at the faucet farthest from the water heater.

Wrapping the water heater tank with an insulation jacket can save $10 to $40 a year. The jackets can be purchased at many hardware or building supply stores for less than $25. You can insulate both gas and electric water heaters. Follow safety instructions provided by the manufacturer.

A water-saving showerhead can save many families over $70 a year. These models provide a forceful shower but are engineered to use less water. They are ideal for larger families. Since they use less water, the last person in line stands a better chance of getting a hot shower.

Save Money on Lighting

We all remember our parents' admonishments to turn off lights, and while they were right, you can usually save much more by changing standard incandescent light bulbs to more efficient models. For instance, Compact Florescent Light bulbs (CFLs) use up to 75 percent less energy than standard incandescent light bulbs, last up to 10 times longer, cost little up front, and provide a quick return on investment.

CFLs provide the greatest savings in fixtures that are on for a substantial amount of time each day. At a minimum, CFLs should be installed in fixtures that are used at least 15 minutes at a time or several hours per day. The best fixtures to install CFLs in are usually found in family and living rooms, kitchen, dining room, bedrooms, and outdoors.

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Adjust Your Thermostat

The temperature at which you set your thermostat can affect your heating and cooling bills. In winter, try a setting of 65°F to 68°F and wear warm clothing. When air conditioning, use both ceiling and space fans to circulate cool air. You should feel as comfortable at a setting of 80°F to 85°F in summer with fans circulating the air as at 78°F with no air flow.

A programmable thermostat can automatically adjust room temperature to save energy during times when the apartment is unoccupied. You can often replace an existing thermostat with an energy saving programmable one. Be sure to choose a model that is appropriate for your particular heating and cooling equipment (heat pumps require a special type). Choose one that you understand how to use.

Learn other ways to conserve energy and save money:

www.energy.sc.gov

The official website of the South Carolina Energy Office

*Based on information provided by the Southface Energy Institute.
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